

GREETING DIVERSITY

A Hermeneutical Insight in Healing Religious Transgression

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Introduction

In the plurality of religious thought and faith, spirit of the time has directed humanity towards new stage of religious understanding which is more aware with issues of egalitarianism and tolerance in engaging the difference. Here what that seems to be needed is openness, empathy, and sincerity of each tradition to learn and share its knowledge and wisdom with others. We should realize that sharp critics upon religion mostly relied on phenomena of religious transgressions from humanized conducts. In many cases of human history, religions which claim as the source of knowledge, wisdom, love, and peace show paradox and contradictory phenomena. They were often used as significant elements in engaging barbarism, hatred, and violence. It obviously makes assumption on the survival of intolerant religious understanding plausible in contemporary world when we see that recent manifestations of religious hatred still occur up today.

A new paradigm then apparently is necessary to understand religions in this context. Religion here should be treated and interpreted as a dynamic force to develop intercultural understanding and to bridge diverse communities for resolving conflicts and living in peace and mutual respect. It surely does not an easy project but it has to be done. It should be conducted by entering scientific endeavor to discover alternative understanding of religion. Through this devotion, a “new-world” of religious understanding is hoped to be created on the same plains, seas, forests, mountains, skies, and stars of the “old-world” of religious texts or discourses which are viewed and treated by different. And human being will embrace a “new-religion” with God, sacred scriptures, prophets, and rituals of “old-religion” which are approached and believed by different. Pursuing religious salvation for example is not longer by sacrificing the followers of different religions in the name of God,

but that will be attained by love and interfaith brotherhood. On the basis of the awareness, the concern, the fear, the expectation, the dream, and the obsession, it is no more than a call to partake contributing in making the “new-world” with its “new-religion”. Thich Nhat Hanh (2007) says, *“It is possible to live twenty-four hours a day in a state of love.”*

In line with this hope of the pursuit of better future, I have a presumption that hermeneutics can illuminate broader awareness among global citizens to seek emphatically unity in diversity. Furthermore, the hermeneutical insight may be useful in healing religious transgressions. The future should be created by conscious struggles in the spirit of love, peace, and wisdom that through which God the Omnipotence presents and manifests Himself toward worldly eyes of the profane. But, before we move to that point, I think it is important to glimpse at the nature of religion and recent articulations of religious transgression.

Religion of Humanity

Reading Islamic history, as a mirror, religion was born amidst the life of decadent society. With a set of its teachings, religion presents to give a light of alternative ways of thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. These ways were claimed to be able in improving life and bringing happiness and even eschatological salvation. From the first second, religion calls for messages which provide pushes and strength to move and do changes. So, from the beginning religion intends to make change. Religion insists with its thoughts and beliefs about certain patterns of life which are set up to improve or substitute the existing patterns of life that are regarded corrupted (*jahiliyah*).

New reference of values and thoughts about life and how should we experience and manage life has become a particular ‘political agenda’ of religion. Religion seems to have willingness to be alternative reference of values and thoughts which are living in historical reality as attitudes, behaviors, and even functional systems. Religion negates intentions to make itself as merely a discourse in vacuum space. Religion wants itself to become and always partake in actual process of human history and never be separated from it. As if religion is alienated from human

history, so it actually has lost its roles and functions as guidance and reference of life for human beings.

Religion in certain perspective such as Islam is believed coming from God, the Almighty who is seen different at all from human beings and other creatures. But, when religion comes into the life of His profane creatures, religion is not the God Himself. Religion as a representation of God's will or thought about what is good and right, what is permitted, what should be done and vice versa, at the same time has been transformed to be a constellation of texts or objects which are open to be read and interpreted by human beings.

Understanding distinction between God's 'area' and human beings' in this contexts can be traced through reading categorical concept proposed by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1990; 1995) in approaching Qur'anic texts where he differentiates between *kalam* dan *lughah*. His basic idea is the understanding that the inspirator of the Qur'an is God Himself. But, when God's *kalam* which is supernatural enters universe's reality by choosing Muhammad who was natural as its receptor through *lughah* (Arabic), at that time the Divine revelation has been historicized and humanized by cultural intervention and linguistic framework. However, there is ontological distance between God's reality in one hand and Muhammad and his language in another hand. This is why, for Abu Zayd, the Qur'an is necessary to be seen as a historical text born in particular culture which means that it also represents certain cultural character. The Qur'an then can become a subject of historical understanding and interpretation.

So, religion is a great gift from God the Creator of universe for human beings, the main actors who are trusted to manage His other creatures. Religion is obviously intended not accidental that is sent to and for human beings, not God. From here, religion is indeed a humanity affair. For that reason, religion is in natural if growing to be so human. And by becoming like that religion rises lofty and glorious as a constellation of teachings and values. The loftiness of religion believed flowing from God's idea appears through its manifestation as something profane and human. Whatsoever, in fact, human beings are impossible to become God. Human beings are

not God and will never be the truly God. How high and sophisticated the religiosity of human beings, everything keeps to be a part and within the area of its humanity which is fully limited and relative.

By understanding it, a talk about religion will become misdirection when it loses its context namely its humane aspects and profanity of life. Religiosity which separates itself from partaking into complexities of human life is no more than a lie masqueraded with the sacred aura of religion. And when religion with its divine equivocations is used to oppress human qualities is actually the truly religious blasphemy and insult. In lower grade, religious transcendence which neglects the devotion to humanity is a vulgar manipulation of the nature of religion as a power which drives changes to realize welfare and justice for human beings and their life.

Religious Totalitarianism

Today's human beings are facing an era where rationality is no longer single. Plurality of thoughts and beliefs on truth has become an undeniable necessity. In this context, what seemed to be needed are positive attitudes such as openness and empathy. With these characters, humility to learn and share knowledge or wisdom with others will grow. Furthermore, those can also stimulate consciousness and readiness to accept their particular authenticity which is existentially not separated from universality of humanity.

It is a pity that there are not few historical facts showing religious manifestations contradictory with the mentioned characters above. One of them is called religious totalitarianism. Thomas Friedman, as quoted by Eboo Patel (2003), writes that World War III will happen in the form of battle against *religious totalitarianism*. It means not only believing certain religion as the truest one, but also involving the belief that only one interpretation of religion is right. This kind of interpretation is kept in faith to be embraced and implemented by everyone else. In defending this system, violence often becomes the main weapon. Friedman then argues that the real battle field of World War III is *religious education* where totalitarianism ideology planted.

If we reflect deeply on these phenomena, the Qur'an has introduced plurality and relativity in very radical manner. Allah says,

(وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرَهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ)

"If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!" (X: 99)

Allah also states,

(لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنِ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ)

"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks.

And Allah heareth and knoweth all things." (II: 256)

Over here, it is not surprise if Abdul Munir Mulkhan (2002) then says that there will be no single interpretation of Islam, the Qur'an, or the prophet tradition (Sunnah). The main point is whether each religion has willingness and openness to meet and engage dialog with others and not merely holding their own particular truth claims. In other words, the result of interpretation even personal-subjectively accepted and believed as an absolute is still relative when certain understanding meets interpersonal-objectively with others in public contexts.

If this is responded with humility and open minded it can imply dialogical chance for developing religiosity which is plural, emphatic, and tolerant. KH. Ahmad Dahlan ever stated that openness to learn from others is very important to enhance and widen knowledge and insight in supporting implementation of religion more. For him, truth and goodness are the result of seeking and not merely imitating others blindly (*taqlid*). And even the horizon of someone who learns different ideas from her/his own is enhanced but s/he does automatically not accept those ideas without such reflection (Jainuri, 1999).

Thus, the truth will be understood as a product that is not reluctant to face critics and also not hesitate with differences as it is resulted from positive attitudes about relative nature of human beings. Consequently, it pushes someone to improve

the quality of her/his religiosity and to be open to the truth that possible comes from other persons, groups, or denominations. While the truth which is preserved by attitudes of closing their selves from critics and changes is no more than a lie that is cultivated by deceptive cult (*ta'dhim*), fanaticism (*asabiyah*), and arrogance (*kibr*). God says,

(كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظِرٌ)

“Day, but man doth transgress all bounds, In that he looketh upon himself as self-sufficient.”

(XCVI: 6-7)

Idiopathic Religiosity

Religious transgression apparently does not take form of totalitarianism, but also in the form of idiopathic. It means that religious articulation may tend to idiopathic attitudes and behaviors toward surrounding social problems. Religion seems to be merely ritualism and spiritual transcendence which are detached from busy occurrences of human life. Various real problems which are faced by society look being out of her/his religious responsibility. Here, religion is then being a blind, deaf, and dumb against social-cultural phenomena such as narcotics, free-sex, abortion, AIDS, human trafficking, illegal logging, corruption, and so forth. While it is understood above that the essence and also roles of religion basically are being alternative power which has ability to enlighten and emancipate human beings from the stocks of dark life (*dzulumat al-hayah*) that oppresses human dignity. Religion is not to call human beings for being calm in the silence of mosque building, but it is indeed to call them for being brave to transform the down realm of human system in its various aspects as the place of prostration (*masjid*) and the real battle field of *jihad*. There, human beings should fight with fully consciousness and hearted will.

Social-cultural implications which may emerge from this idiopathic religiosity, if we analyze, do not be less ironic than the previous religious orientation namely religious totalitarianism. If the formers' mode of transgression is born from the will to monopolize truth in the public sphere, the latter appears from the lump of will to act or transform religiosity in the public sphere. Even both religiosities are still on the same layer of religious existentiality, that is, exclusive and dogmatic religiosity.

Talking this issue will be interesting if we read Said Sewell's finding (2001) from his research on Baptist church community in Atlanta. Sewell studied how religious articulation of their religious leaders particularly concerning their participation in community development. From this study he found that they commonly have adequate concerns and high consciousness about social issues which become problems of their community. But, when they were asked about what action they have done to face and solve those problems, he noted that 78% of them responded the problems by preaching on their religious pulpits. While no more than 36% confessed having partaken in specific actual actions. And who actively helps to organize efforts for revitalizing community accounted no more than 44%.

Through these findings, we can comprehend that the concern and consciousness toward real problems do not automatically bring someone to engage direct-participation in advocacy or emancipative actions. Here, we face a question about what causes that make them "failed" to partake in direct-participation actively to solve their community problems? Why do most of them only prefer to take indirect-participation by acting passive and symbolic attitudes?

This low interest of religious clergies to engage in social articulation of their community surely does not mean that their existence is not important. Even if we have to answer those questions mentioned above, learning from Sewell, the following statements may properly be considered. First is theological difference factor. This factor influences certain religious community reluctant or even rejecting to engage and share with other different religious community in social action. Second is a theology that has other-world perspective. It focuses and orientates religious articulations to more eschatological spirituality rather than its profane or worldly material aspects. Third, there are views among religious clergies who see that actual roles in responding secular challenges or non ritualistic problems will be better to be delivered or entrusted to other or non religious organizations which have concerns on them.

Hermeneutics of Love

After identifying portrait of religious transgression we now can step to reflect hermeneutical insight. It may illuminate us in grasping how religious transgression may be healed. First of all, I remain agree with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1998) when he said that the development of all knowledge is dependent on understanding. It is the reason why I keep seeing that the cause of religious transgression is lying on the problem of interpretation or, generally speaking, religious understanding. The misinterpretation or misunderstanding emerges from what I call the abuse or the transgression of understanding from what I understand as the heart of religion namely wisdom, love, and peace. This transgression often plays actively in religious hatred articulations as stereotyped schemas or patterns of thought in addressing plurality and diversity. Stereotypes can lead to automatic activation of prejudicial thoughts and behaviors toward people based on their different attributes (Westen, 1996). This is what can contribute to prejudice, discrimination, and religious hatred. Unfortunately, stereotypes are commonly imprinted into human mind from very early period of human development.

We here find that hermeneutics can bring us to see several points of insight in comprehending religious transgression. They are about human presence, finitude, truth, and meaning. Trough these concepts we will discover that hermeneutics enables us to understand, appreciate, and admit diversity which are negated by the faith of religious transgressors. Healing religious transgression then can be started from greeting diversity. And hermeneutics in its nature will always require difference (Davey, 2006). Here, hermeneutics of love and peace as a dialogical partner of hermeneutics of hatred and violence will tell us about the necessity of celebrating diversity in our life. Gadamer (1977) said, "*Hermeneutics has its origin in breaches in intersubjectivity. Its field of application is comprised of all those situations in which we encounter meanings that are not immediately understandable but require interpretive effort.*"

Presence

The world is a house where the diversity lives in. And each of us is part of it. Whether we are relieved to accept it or not, every presence in the contexts of diversity presupposes the existence of association or relation with others. The grade and value of certain relation among presences will also create its relational diversity. What then becomes interesting to be looked carefully is no other than our own presence in the worldly diversity we possess it. How do we read, understand, and interpret it? Paul Ricoeur believed that we can see ourselves reflected in the other and see the other as part of oneself. He also believed that we can only understand the world by balancing antinomies such as justice and love, altruism and selfishness, the other and the self (Scott-Baumann, 2009).

Our presence is a historical presence. It is not a presence in vacuum. It is a presence in certain context of space, time, and relation. Even from first minutes of our presence in this world, we have been touched by history. So, each of us is indeed a product of presence which is not isolated from others. Our religious identity is an example. It grows along with the growth of our intellectual and emotion under the care of our society's cultural process. When someone was born in a family and community which majority consists of Muslims, for instance, s/he tends to be directed to embrace and identify her/his identity as a Muslim. The same pattern actually can be applied into forms of sub-cultural identity of various religious understandings or schools.

It is important to be noted that finality may become alien term for presence. Altogether with its relational context, however, the presence lives and grows through interaction with other presences. Here, certain identity of presence is not impossible to experience the process of development. A person is apparently not static. S/he can grow through a dialectical process between self image and public image about her/himself. Richard Jenkins (1996) terms it as *internal-external dialectic of identification*. This framework is surely not meant to limit that process as a rigid mechanism. In short, certain identity of presence is a result of continuum reading process done by someone about her/himself and also of her/his understanding

about how others see her/him. A person then in her/his life and intellectual development must be influenced by others whether they are her/his teachers, friends, or even enemies (Malaka, 1999).

Finitude

From this standpoint we now can understand that our presence in this world is in a frame. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) said, "*Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness*". Space, time, relation, and also interaction in extent bring us to the point of awareness that our presence is clearly not infinite. Our presence in another side is integrated within our human finitude and also this world. It means that the width and depth of knowledge and insight which may be gained by our wildest mind are impossible to attain absolute level. There is always a hole of chance in it where questions that inspire new seek and journey of truth seem to be necessary or even sometimes must be done.

Being aware of this finitude strengthens understanding of the necessity of diversity or plurality. In human finitude, the world can reveal into many faces. And it frequently happens that the faces which are believed as the right face of the world collides each others. Consequently, putting the axis of world's face does not become a simple task anymore. In its finitude, human beings and the world are infinite complexities. So that, when the presence closes itself from differences, at the same time, it is actually closing its eyes or heart from the wealth of its life and world. Conversely, when the presence opens itself for differences, the world is ready to smile in giving the wealth it possesses.

It is right that the finitude is about the limitation. It ontologically reminds us not to be trapped in the cage of absolutism. It always whispers about the existential possibility of others, differences, and alternatives. While in axiological perspective it also guides us not to be blocked into the stock of exclusivism. It says continuously that the process of reading, learning, and seeking the wisdom of life will not end until the coming of death. Who has ability to light the candle of knowledge or wisdom is always possible to come from anywhere. For this reason, we have only possibility to realize or see that presence when we have willingness to open the

windows or doors of our house of truth. Surely, it is done to greet and be greeted by others. In sum, finitude basically does not ask us to quit from seeking. Each point of finding is no more than the beginning of new seeking. Finitude vividly talks about the boundaries. But in fact, each of these boundaries is a bridge which links our horizon with new horizon of knowledge and insight that may be very sexy to be touched.

Truth

Curiosity is a character of rational human beings. Along our life, there are many things we want to know. Beside that, we are also care of what we know. Not only imitating or following what others say blindly, we want what we know is true. We want that our knowledge is not false and deceiving. Furthermore, if we are greeted by the truth which has different construction with ours, we may be tempted to know more about. We may then ask whether what we know or believe so far is true or false. Because we find that about the same thing, others have different view which they believe as the true.

Interestingly, today's world has become a market which is flooded by the presence of various products of ideas and thoughts. Each product with its famous brands is likely offering its own strength to be bought or used. In one hand, we have so many options to fulfill what we need. In another hand, this noisy of information also stimulates fundamental epistemic problems about justification of knowledge and its truth (Audi, 2003; Stocker, 2006; Fumerton, 2006). Where the truth really is? Is it in our hands or in others'? Do we have ability to know which is the truth found?

When we remember our relational presence and then our finitude that becomes the inevitable factuality of life, it can not be avoided that the truth becomes an arena of competing truth claims. The problem then relies on how far certain claim is able to defend its existence with a set of argumentation. Here, appreciative attitudes toward differences find their center. Each attainment of human knowledge is placed with honor on the love altar of truth. The diversity or plurality of results of seeking the truth is the process of finitude which is not final yet. Reading, understanding, and interpreting are a business which is far from being finished. *"No interpretation is safe.*

Even after an authentic projection has been drawn from primordial sources, we cannot assume it will be preserved” (Caputo, 1987). There is always something new in the process of appropriation (Ricoeur, 1981). There is interpretrans which has always a chance to rise in the process of interpretation of certain interpretandum (Gracia, 1995). This attitude will enable our presence to move on equilibrium phalanx between two contradictory poles, dogmatism and skepticism (Ricoeur, 1976).

Meaning

In this world, there are many of knowledge and wisdom can be pursued. The wild of our mind is not necessary to worry of exhausting option to fulfill its desire. But, the knowledge and wisdom are clearly not merely for being found and collected. At least, knowledge or wisdom has prescriptive dimension to serve a goal. The problem is for what reason that knowledge or wisdom we seek. In other words, what does having knowledge or wisdom mean in this era? Is it to answer our stupidity? Is it to satisfy the curiosity of our mind? Or, does it serve something which goes beyond us? Are there altruistic values in knowledge or wisdom we possess that will transform ourselves to pass the boundaries of narcissistic egoism?

Knowledge and wisdom come into our worldly finitude. With the epistemic diversity which paints its wealth, knowledge and wisdom can explain many things about human beings and their history from *‘azali* era until globalization (see: Bartels & Wiemann, 2007). But, as far as knowledge and wisdom have become the light for the world and human history, their truth apparently need more than explaining words. God has said in the Qur’an,

قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

“Say (O Muhammad Peace be upon him), "Produce your proof if you are truthful."” (II:111)

We know that the proof meant in religious term sometimes need not only theoretical or conceptual one, but also empirical or practical. And hermeneutics today is not merely talking about understanding and interpreting the truth. It is now putting also on the praxis consequences of the results of certain understanding and interpretation

of the truth. Hermeneutics is clearly about human mind. Furthermore, it is also about the life itself.

Conclusion

Religion is commonly understood as a constellation of truth teaching and good values. As an entity that is believed coming from God, religion is indeed revealed or developed to devote for humanity. For this reason, religious articulations which grow in private and public spaces should not transgress this role. Here, multicultural discourse or interaction including religious-based one is expected to get strengthen by being more open, emphatic, tolerant, and transformative. As Moeslim Abdurrahman (2007) said that civilization will never be built without admitting human life altogether with its plurality as well as the truth that is impossible struggled in absolute form. The truth basically must be pursued together and talked continuously. The truth itself has many features as the same as alienation of humanity has its own varieties. For these reasons, the truth will never be in its own singularity because in history not in words the truth is always circled by its own culture and community.

Along with this consciousness that all aspect of human life actually is touched and may be altered by culture including the way of religious thinking and acting, hermeneutics has brought us to fully realize that human beings destined to be limited. Their knowledge will never be separated from this nature. Human finitude is always embedded in human acts of thinking. Human reading or interpretation is never free from subjectivity. It means that all interpretive products are subjects to be challenged. None is safe from question and critic. Objectivity in its narrow notion of exact sciences as well as absolutism does not make sense anymore here. Multiplicity of meaning is natural in life. So, the life of human beings then is basically a problem of celebrating diversity.

However, this reality also brings a potential offer to transform or reform societies for better future. It is based on understanding that certain religious construction whether regarded as the transgressed or the pristine is not impossible to be changed, revised, or modified. Here we can choose to embrace what kind of

hermeneutics in our life, hermeneutics of love and peace or hermeneutics of hatred and violence. I still keep in faith that the former mentioned is the suitable choice. It has illuminative and emancipative influences in healing religious transgressions. As the call of Abu Zayd (2006), in this context, we should join our efforts to fight exclusive and isolating claims of truth and their consequences by all possible democratic means. Otherwise, hermeneutical understandings on human presence, finitude, truth, and meaning have also reminded us that diversity is natural in our profane life. It is needed to be approached and managed by bringing openness, empathy, and caring of others to the front of any efforts against religious transgressions such as religious totalitarianism and idiopathic religiosity.

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